

A scary feeling

During my 3 a.m. morning bike rides, I don't expect any surprises. Sometimes there are a few distractions: the long, lonely whining whistle of a train as it rocks along in the distance; the infrequent noise of a car passing on its way to or from a casino; an occasional cat that darts across my path on its way to a more secluded home; a rat scurrying along as he tries to make a fast exit from my path; the constant thrashing of the early morning waves; the unusual occasion of some guys playing basketball outside their house or the occasional lamp lit ghostly figure fishing for soft shell crab or flounder.

I rarely expect to see anyone else out walking at that ungodly hour. But, yesterday morning was different. As I cycled down the bike path, lit by the street lights and the full moon, I noticed a tall dark figure in the distance moving in the same direction. I realized I would pass him eventually. But how could I warn him of my impending approach. I didn't want to scare him. I didn't have a bike bell to warn him. My bike light was useless to warn him of my approach. My shadow might give him a head start of my coming and he could be prepared. So, what should I do?

Within twenty yards of our encounter, I decided on an approach. As I got closer, I decided to announce my arrival with a gentle "Good Morning." Then it happened. As soon as my words reached his ears from behind, he staggered all over the place like a drunken man as if he was hearing the voice of God calling him home and he didn't expect it. As I passed him, I heard some unintelligible words. They were like the words of a scared man who was suddenly woken from a bad nightmare. Some time later, I heard some intelligible words – "Good Morning."

This morning when I went out for my ride, I anticipated another shock. To my relief, the shocked man from yesterday didn't appear. I was relieved that I would not appear out of the ghostly mist of early morning. Maybe, he was still recovering or maybe he waited for daylight when he would be less susceptible to any more surprises.

I thought about the man and his startling and scary encounter. I noticed how we react, often negatively, when caught off guard by things that are beyond our control. During Halloween, even though it is about scary encounters, we are not scared because we expect the unusual. It is when we are confronted with fear unawares that our protective instinct kicks in.

During the last few months, I have noticed the volume of negative political advertisements on television, both locally and nationally. I notice how the fear element drives such negative advertisements. The airwaves are saturated with them and every time one comes on a channel, I change the channel immediately. It seems, not only are such advertisements premised on fear tactics, they may also lead to apathy on the part of viewers and potential voters. Punters indicate that such negative and attack advertisements are successful. Are they successful in bringing about disenchantment in the minds of potential voters as well? With such a saturation of negative advertisements, one wonders, when one sees personal voting attack advertisements, does the attacker have any replacement platform of their own? It is easy to say what one stands against, but the real question is, what does one stand for?

I often hear people say they would never get into politics. They fear for their privacy which becomes part of their public persona. They are put off by the cut-throat wheeling and dealing that goes on as well as the nominal political correctness that is expected.

Tomorrow morning, when I go for my usual early morning bike ride, my eyes will peel the path ahead just in case some solitary figure, dressed in a grey sweat suit, happens to be meandering along, filled with his own world thoughts. Then I will have to make a decision. How will I remind him in a gentle way that I am just another human being out enjoying the early morning quiet and that he has nothing to fear?

Still, I am left with the same question posed by someone else: Who is more foolish, the child afraid of the dark or the man afraid of the light?